

Follow Your Children To Jesus

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[0 : 00] This is how Paul asked us to pray for, asked the Ephesians to pray for him, and the way I'd like you to pray for me.

That utterance may be given, me, Paul writes, in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I might declare it boldly as I ought to speak.

Father, that you will grant that boldness, and help us to hear that you may be bold in our lives and in our witness to you.

We ask this in your holy name. Amen. Amen. Page 44 in the New Testament section of your Pew Bible, Mark chapter 10.

I guess I want page 43. Mark chapter 10, verse 13. If you could turn to that on page 43 in the New Testament section of your Pew Bible.

[1 : 31] As you follow it there, I'm going to read to you the NIV translation, New International Version. People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them.

When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, Let the little children come to me. Do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

I tell you the truth. Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God, like a little child, will never enter it.

He took the children in his arms, put his hands on them, and blessed them. One of the most powerful instincts in human society is the instinct parents have for their children.

And I think it can hardly be possible that a parent knowing anything about the person of the Lord Jesus would not want to bring their child to Jesus.

[2 : 58] Because we do want to bring our children to the very best that we know. And the very best that they can have.

And so we see that they go to the best schools. We see that they have the best possible friends. We want them to have the best possible teachers.

We want them to grow up in the best possible situation. And so it's not surprising to read that the children who were contemporary to the Lord Jesus, that their parents brought them to Jesus, that he would touch them.

And in the course of the next two or three months, a lot of people with that same basic desire will come to this congregation. They will not come for their own benefit because most of them believe that they have got all from the church the church can give.

And therefore, it can't do them much good. I'm being slightly cynical, but not altogether. But they do want for their children something which many people, thank God, sense was a blessing to them.

[4 : 20] And that was what they learned of the Lord Jesus as children themselves. And so they bring their children to Jesus. Well, when they get there, we read in this story, the disciples rebuke them.

As disciples did then and do now, children get in the way of proper worship in a church like this. They get in the way.

They foul up most of the programs we have. But we have to pretty well design our church program so that the children won't annoy us or get in our way. And so we, like them, try and send the children away.

It's not surprising. It's not surprising, too, in the whole order of the Gospel of Mark, time and time again, the disciples are shown up as not really understanding what Jesus wanted to do and what he came to do.

And so in a congregation like this, we suffer very often from the same thing, not really being in touch with what Jesus wants us to do, how he wants us to orientate our life together, how he wants us to relate to one another.

[5 : 46] And so we tend to try and deal with children. One very angry parent told me one day when he thought our program for children was totally inadequate, that we should put a sign outside the church saying, children not wanted, because we didn't make adequate provision for them in his mind.

But it's terribly serious what we do with respect to children and how we orientate ourselves towards them.

They were let in on a secret this morning that none of us were let in on. There's a lot of secrets that they could be let in on at the top of your voice that the rest of us wouldn't catch on to, but children are responsive in a way that perhaps we're not.

The seriousness of the mistake that the disciples made is covered by a very sobering verse in the previous chapter in which Jesus says, Now, that is gentle Jesus, meek and mild, who says that statement.

And I would like you to hear it and to recognize the high seriousness with which children are taken in the New Testament and how it's very easy for the disciples not to recognize the importance of that.

[7 : 40] Children have their own world and adults very much need to be admitted to it.

That we tend to think that our business is to make children, adults, as soon as possible. The New Testament very clearly says, The thing that needs to happen in our world is that adults be admitted to the world of children for the simple reason that in what Christ says, I tell you that anyone who will not receive the kingdom like a little child will never enter into it.

Somehow, they can teach us something which is very fundamental to the Christian faith. They accept the fact that they are small, but we need to learn to make ourselves small.

It comes naturally to them to say, Abba, Father. It is a great gift of God's Holy Spirit to you or to me as adults to be able to kneel down, making ourselves small, and say, Abba, Father.

Children are in a place of perpetual repentance before their parents, who are aware of all the mistakes they make and spend most of the day telling them about it.

[9 : 25] But the difference is that if you treated an adult that way, you'd probably be shot between the eyes fairly soon. But children accept this, and they're in a constant condition of repentance in order that they can do better next time.

And a child in a good learning situation is in that situation, perpetual repentance that leads to an awareness of unfathomable grace.

And that's why Jesus tells us that we need to... He tells us that if we will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child, we simply won't enter it.

And a lot of us, by our very lifestyle and manner and approach to things, disqualify ourselves from ever entering the kingdom. And so it becomes very important.

Now, there's a couple of ways in which I want to illustrate this to you. I'd like, before the service is over, to introduce Annie Clark to you, but I don't know if she's here or not.

[10 : 42] Somebody can perhaps tell me. Annie, do you want to come up now, Annie? Because I'd love to make a... I'm sorry to do this to you, but I'd like everybody to see you. This is Annie Clark, who was written up in the newsletter, which you will receive next week, but she's also mentioned in the bulletin today.

And... Annie, just in a word, tell us what you're doing tomorrow and after that. I'm leaving for Honduras tomorrow to work in a girls' orphanage in San Pedro Sula.

For how long? For a year. And what did you do last year? I graduated from high school. Prince of Wales. Prince of Wales. Well, thank you, Annie.

And we'll ask you to come up at the end just so that we can pray for you as you head off to Honduras tomorrow. We're under the sponsorship of the South American Missionary Society who are unarranged in that.

And I'm very proud of Annie. I remember this congregation in doing that. And I wanted you to see her. She may not have chosen to see you in this particular vantage point.

[11 : 57] I understand. Or I could tell you about Kathy Calderon, who's going to Holland next week to work with Youth with a Mission.

And I'm told I can't embarrass Andrea Neal in the same way as I've just done to Annie. But Andrea is going off with sail and life training for nine months on one of the big ships to sail the world around and work out what hard work and close fellowship and Christian faith all mean.

And Andrea, I think, leaves tomorrow as well. And so, and Don McDonald is leaving next week to work in Japan.

And that's very important. So, it's important because I want to just show you something, which maybe you all got in the mail this week.

It's a very interesting brochure from Stanley B. Hagen, Minister of Education for the Province of British Columbia.

[13 : 15] And I am not about to indulge in a little government bashing. But it says here that, it says what the education program of the Province of British Columbia is about.

And it puts the whole thing in a context where they face a whole new era of changing technological and economic realities.

So, they're going to school to learn to survive a new era of changing technological and economic realities.

In other words, they can't follow in the path of their parents. Because in our changing society, most of their parents are redundant by the time they're 50.

And so, what's the use of following? They have to live in a changing world and they're being educated for that. And this article, which I presume was sent to every home, and you'll probably find it in your junk mail for the past week.

[14 : 33] And I'd like you to read it, just to be informed. It says, we're setting together standards to help our kids meet the fierce challenge that exists throughout a changing, increasingly competitive world.

In other words, we're going to take the children of this province, and for five days a week, we're going to teach them to compete, to compete with the whole world in order that when the battle is over, they will be the survivors.

It says that children are, we're spending money, and the money they're spending is something like \$3.2 billion.

We're spending it in order to provide for a nurture of our most valuable resource.

And here I am loathe to say, but since this province has a long history of exploiting its resources, I fear, for a government that now has decided that our children are our most valuable resource.

[15 : 55] But that's what it says. And it says that it wants those children to adapt to new philosophies and to new programs, so that they will, so that the children of British Columbia will not only face the future, but they will shape it.

Now, that's the program that the government of this province wants, with \$3.2 billion and \$650 million on capital expenditures, are going to invest in this most valuable resource.

And of course, I think that you would have to say that the education proposed here is somewhat incomplete. And if our children are going to be exposed to that in the realm of public education, at some level, it would be very important that we should follow the example of the people in Mark's Gospel who brought their children to Jesus that he might bless them.

It's very important that the children should come to Jesus. And it's our business, I think, to bring them. Now, the person I'd like you to meet is Steve Barthold.

I don't know where Steve is, but Steve, could you come up? Steve usually is up here with a trumpet, but I guess he hasn't got one this morning. So I, and I won't ask you to say anything, but Steve is gun fodder for us.

[17 : 46] We're sending him into the front line to be shot at. And, and I'm telling you this. Now this is, this is important that you understand this, that we have run a children's education program here ever since I've been here.

And, year by year, we simply burn people out. The reason we burn them out is we put them in a place where they are exposed to all the needs of all the families, and we don't give them any support.

We've done a bad job as a congregation in not supporting them. We, last year at this time, I was introducing Peggy Friesen to you, and Peggy did a superb job with our kids, but simply lacked guidance, counsel, and support all year long.

And she was left with the whole job. And now we've taken gullible Steve here, and we're putting him in that position. And it's my profound longing that you as a congregation will support him, and will encourage him, and will make this the best year of his life.

And I'm not sure, because most of his qualifications for the job is that he doesn't know what he's getting into. And people who do wouldn't accept the job.

[19 : 20] And that's why I'm very anxious that you should see Steve, and you should get to know him. When the service is over, the other Steve, Steve and James, is going to stand with Steve Barthold at one of those doors over there, so that every parent and every potential teacher in the congregation will go out that door and shake hands with Steve Barthold and give him some kind of encouragement as you go.

So, Steve, will you prepare yourself for that, and be ready to meet people after the service? You see, what I'm saying, I mean, in the light of this, which is the education policy of the province of British Columbia, and in the light of Mark chapter 10, verse 13, there are certain basics that we have to face up to.

And there is a basic longing, I think, on the part of parents to bring their children to Jesus. And time and time again, the means by which parents have come to faith in Jesus Christ is by teaching their children the faith.

And time and time again, members of a congregation have understood the Christian faith for the first time when they took it upon themselves to teach children.

And so there's a basic need to do that. There is a basic rejection of children built into any organization because children don't fit into organizations.

[21 : 03] So that the more highly organized we become as a parish, the more we push the children and young people to the periphery of things because they don't fit. That's why the disciples drove them back, I'm sure, because they didn't think it was appropriate that they should come to Jesus.

And the churches, by doing that, can arouse, as the disciples did, the basic indignation of God. You know, it says there that Jesus, when he saw what was happening, was indignant. And that's when he spoke to them. Because we were putting obstacles in the way of children.

The kind of obstacles which Jesus says merits the most profound punishment, being dropped in the depths of the sea with a large millstone round your neck.

So that one of the most rewarding of experiences is to be involved with children. Now the difficulty is that we want children to enter our world.

[22 : 18] What Jesus is teaching us is that we need to enter theirs, their world of imagination, their world of relating. We don't want them to become children.

The whole of the New Testament seems to me to be a shout from the mountaintops. Except you become as little children. Except you be born again, becoming as a little child.

Except from your heart, the cry goes out, Abba, Father. Except for this. So that the whole story of the New Testament is that adults should become children.

And the basic way to do that is to work with them, to work among them, to work for them. And we have ample opportunity to do that. And we need desperately to do it for our own soul's health.

It's terribly important. And I see it all the time. And when we get out of touch with the children of the parish, I think we might as well close down.

[23 : 24] I don't think that anything good can happen to us if it's not, if children aren't terribly important to us. It's one of the most rewarding experiences.

There's that strange verse in Timothy which says, A woman shall be saved in childbearing. And the meaning of that seems to be that the bearing and nurturing of children is a work well-pleasing to God which promotes salvation.

salvation. So, though we can't all bear children, we can all assist in the nurturing of children. And salvation is something which you become aware of.

It's a work that promotes God's saving grace among us.

And that's terribly important, I think. You know that the last verse of the Old Testament, which you may take as the immediate prelude to the New Testament, tells about a prophecy which will be fulfilled when the Lord will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers.

[25 : 07] It's a very profound statement, isn't it? And then comes the Gospel of Matthew. That's the last thing that is said. I don't want to go on and tell you more about it because I really think it's so

important.

And I don't want to distort it for you, but it seems that that's the way it is. And the reason that Jesus says, I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it, is that the characteristic posture of any adult towards the rest of humanity is, you can't give me anything.

And the characteristic posture of a child is, I am willing to receive anything that you will give me. And that's why we're told by Jesus that our fundamental relationship to God is to be learned from children when we can say, not to God, you can't give me anything.

And someone whom I know very well, who's messed around in his marriage and who's been very successful in his profession and has achieved standing, suddenly made the great discovery that he doesn't need God anymore.

God, you can't give me anything because I've got it all for myself. And he desperately needs to hear, as we need to hear, that what children can do, and that is in a condition of continuing repentance to be able to receive the unfathomable grace of God in Jesus Christ.

[27 : 10] And my prayer for us as a congregation is that in our care and attention and love for children and finding a place for them in this congregation and nurturing and loving and caring for them and leading them in a world where they will be taught to be competitive, but they may gain the whole world and lose their souls unless we bring them to Jesus and make sure that that's a very important part of their lives.

And in doing that, we too may receive the kingdom in a way that we have never known. Amen.